THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

Vol. 3, No. 2 February, 1964

This issue contains much news of general interest, and a summing up of many of the projects we have inaugurated for 1964. The status of Tom Shea's 2 numbers is discussed; Treemonisha is given some soul-searching and derogatory treatment; some news about other publications has come to light and is mentionned; details of a jazz book club are delved into; and a page is given over to letters in the mail-bag. We have also selected another in our reprint series.

Because of our method of handling renewals...that is all subscriptions terminating at the year end, we find ourselves at the end of the year with a subscriber list approaching 400. Renewals to date, however, are not quite up to 200 which leads to some interesting speculation. Do we proceed with some of our larger plans on the assumption that total subscription will once again soon rise to the 400 mark; or do we remain within the bounds imposed by a limited operating budget, itself partly caused by the low number of renewals. As in most business, we try to budget for the year ahead of us, and decide with the finances at our disposal what we can do for the group as a whole. A great part of the decisions made come to us from you in your many interesting letters which bring many proposals and suggestions. We have mentionned before that while your individual letter may go unanswered its contents are thoroughly noted and discussed, and we certainly do not suggest that you stop writing to us. Some of our proposed projects require a considerable capital outlay, others are self-liquidating. Our sheet music reprinting programme which helped subsidize the cost of putting out a newsletter has been largely pre-empted by Max Morath's excellent 100 Classics. The best rags have now been made available in one fell swoop, which is fine since it is this Society's declared intention to provide ragtime in one way or another. However it does remove one of our main sources of funds to some degree, and we must now seek others. We hesitate to increase the subscription rate, but we are faced with a postage increase of 50% in a few months, (from 2¢ to 3¢). We are suggesting to you that you forward your subscription renewal as soon as possible. It's still $2.00.

We have gone to an automatic addressing machine which will save a considerable amount of wear and tear in our addressing department (2 small boys). We hope we will be able to continue afford an envelope, but may have to reluctantly revert to our former system of stapling the newsletter itself.

We hope to get underway soon with our L.P.'s or E.P.'s although membership response has been very disappointing to date, and there has been insufficient to form any sort of conclusion.

SHEET MUSIC DEPT.

This phase of your Society's efforts has been very active the past few months, and we are pleased to report on the individual items:

SPASM RAG and PRAIRIE QUEEN, Tom Shea. These two excellent numbers have been in the hands of a professional autographer for over a month who reports to us that one will be finished and ready for photographing in about 10 days time. The second number will require approximately an extra week. When both numbers have beem 'shot' they will go to the plate maker and then the printer who usually gives us excellent service. Both numbers will have a title page (of Tom's own design) and an insert page, similar to our recent reproductions of Maple Leaf Rag and Original Rags.
As these are newly copyrighted compositions, it is possible that they will be offered at retail for $1.25 each. We anticipate that we will be able to hold the cost to Society subscribers at $1.00, based on a production cost of almost 4 times our reprint programme. Should our production cost be higher tham calculated, we will be forced to increase our selling price to subscribers, but all orders for these two numbers received before our final cost is arrived at, will be honoured at current prices ($1.00 each, postpaid) so send in your $2.00 today for both of these good rags. Delivery will be end of February - early March.

TREEMONISHA.
We would like to thank those who have writtem us about the copyright situation regarding Treemonisha, but we do not believe that this confused status should prevent this work being made available. The Ragtime Society is quite ready and willing to pay a proper royalty to the proper copyright holder if as and when such a person or persons can be located, or can otherwise prove title to the claim. Treemonisha has not been available to the public in printed form since it was first printed in 1911. Copyright law, we understand makes no bones about the fact that a work of art must be made available to the public, which the Society, as a non-profit organization proposes to do.
So much for the legal status; the question as to whether Treemonisha is or is not a work of art is a moot point. The opera did, after all, have only one performance. The reason, in our opinion, is quite obvious. While there are some good passages in the work, for the most part, considerable alteration, touching up etc., here and there would be necessary before it could be classified as a worthwhile opera. However, we do not presume to be judges of what is or what should be good opera material. We mention the foregoing only because it is obvious from your correspondence that many of you treat this project as an absolute 'must'. We do not agree. We have determined that it is technically within our means; that legally we believe we are within the bounds of copyright law; that esthetically, the project does not merit what little time we are able to devote to Society ventures. NEVERTHELESS, if you insist on having Treemonisha, either as a collector or to determine for yourselves its value, and its place in American Music, we will proceed on the following basis:-

We ask you to forward us your cheque for $15.00 marked Treemonisha. The first 25 cheques for Treemonisha which we receive will be set aside and considered as 'Charter Members', and will be entitled to a $2.50 rebate if we receive more than 35 orders which would be around our break-even point. We ask you to send us your cheque without delay, which would be returned to you within 60 days if we do not proceed with the project. 32 people expressed interest. We hope you will all follow through.

We will print on both sides of paper of about 11" x 11". Pages will be punched with 3 holes for inserting into a looseleaf binder of your choice, and there will be a margin of about 3 inches. We will provide covers of stiff cardboard only. The 100 odd pages will come to you unbound.

SHEET MUSIC (cont'd)

Fig Leaf Rag, and Rose Leaf Rag. We have mentionned from time to time that these 2 numbers by Joplin are owned by Jerry Vogel Music Co. Many of us have written to Vogel asking him to re-issue them. Last month we had an answer from his office which read in part, "For sometime now, we have thought about re-issuing an edition of Fig Leaf and Rose Leaf Rags, but just haven't gotten around to doing it, since we have so many other things to do first." The Ragtime Society recently offered to purchase 100 of each number. Perhaps if the Ragtime Review makes a similar request to their readers, and you all individually write to Vogel, the collective result might be early printing of these 2 numbers. The address is 112 West 44th Street, New York 36, N.Y.

100 Ragtime Classics selected by Max Morath.
We have recently acquired a few used copies of this excellent book which we can make available to all Society members at £5.0.0 or US$15.00. These used copies would be described by a collector as being in 'MINT' condition. This offer is directed primarily at our overseas subscribers who have been unable to obtain a new book from the printer. Surface postage is included in the price.

On page 3 of our Dec. 1963 issue, we listed the contents of 3 English folios. We can obtain used copies of these folios in mint condition. These will be priced at $1.50 each. Delivery approximately one month.

BOOKS, CLUBS, ETC.
The Jazz Book Club, DunhamsLane, Letchworth, Herts. (England) specializes in, of all things, books about Jazz. It costs 42/ to join (about $6.00) and we understand the club operates in a manner similar to the Book of the Month Club. The Ragtime Society has taken out a membership in order to stock the books. The only one we have ordered to date is 'They All Played Ragtime' at $2.00. Other titles which we can make available to you are as follows:

Art of Jazz
Blues Fell This Morning
The Book of Jazz
Call Him George
Concerning Jazz
The Country Blues
Death of a Music ?
The Decca Book of Jazz (5.00)
Dictionary of Jazz
Enjoying Jazz
Essays on Jazz
Father of the Blues
A Handbook of Jazz
His Eye is on the Sparrow
History of Popular Music in America (6.50)
The Horn
Jack Teagarden
Jam Session
Jazz Era
Jazz: Hot & Hybrid
The Jazz Word
Just Jazz (3.50)
Play that Music
Second Chorus
The Sound of Surprise
These Jazzmen of Our Time
This is Jazz (5.00)
World in a Jug
Young Man with a Horn.

These books may be ordered for $2.00 each, postpaid, except for the titles after which we have placed the price in brackets. If there is sufficient demand for these books we will be glad to carry a stock locally and further reduce the price. If you want this type of service let us know. We can provide it. Our next newsletter will carry more details about the books.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

MUSIGRAM is published monthly, except in June, July and August, and is the official publication of the National Sheet Music Society, Inc., 5010 Reeder Avenue, Covina, California. The February 1964 issue is devoted to Ragtime and consists of 3 excellent articles on early ragtime. Ragtime Pioneers in Sedalia by Clyde B Neibarger of the Kansas City Star originally appeared in that paper on April 16, 1951. As its title suggests, the article deals with the people, times and events around the turn of the century in Sedalia. The Ragtime Kid, and From Rags to Ragtime, both by Brun Campbell are taken from original manuscripts in the Fisk University Library. In the former, Campbell relates details of his early life with his family in Kansas, of the railway and land speculations which took place, of the land 'runs', (principally the Cherokee Strip run of 1891), and other fascinating stories of his start in the honkytonks and sporting houses of the day. The second of his articles tells of his associations with Scott Joplin.

Musigram did not specifically state so, but we would imagine that if you sent them the $3.00 annual membership fee, and requested that they commence your subscription with the February number, they would be glad to do so.

MUSIC MEMORIES and JAZZ REPORT.

We recently received the Winter 1963 (?) copy of this combined magazine. With Paul Affeldt, recently of Jazz Report as Editor and Pat Cather of Music Memories as Publisher, the format appears to be largely the same as Music Memories but with contributions by both men. It will be published quarterly from 314 Windsor Drive, Birmingham, Alabama.

JASS, INCORPORATED Newsletter, Vol II, No. 1 reached us recently from Minneapolis, where it is published 6 times a year by Frank Gillis, at 69 Melbourne Ave S.E. They incorporate local news and rumours, book and record reviews and 3 pages of obituaries, including that of J. Russell Robinson who died in California last Sept 30 at the age of 71.

RAGTIME SOCIETY NEWSLETTER BACK NUMBERS.

We have available most of our back issues. In 1962 we printed 10 issues and our January letter of introduction stating our aims. For 1962 we have Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, and the January one page letter, and 16 only copies of the magnificent programme printed by Paragon Paper for the Massey Hall Concert given by Bob Darch and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, May 1962.

For 1963 all 10 issues are available.

One dollar for each year will bring you what is available.

THE RAGTIME REVIEW. For the benefit of new readers of this newsletter, who are looking for additional matter on the subject of CLASSIC RAGTIME, we again recommend the Ragtime Review. Issued quarterly for $1.00 from 1050 Grenoble Lane, Florissant, Missouri. You can't go wrong.

THEY ALL PLAYED RAGTIME. Blesh & Janis. We have located in the U.K. a source of this book, usually referred to by ragophiles as 'the bible'. We have extolled its virtues many times, and will only add here, that it appears to be as complete as the paper back we were handling and which is now unavailable. We have ordered a shipment of these books but they have not yet arrived; however, we believe they are hard covers, but donot contain the photographs which the paper back did. We offer them at $2.00 postpaid. We learned of this source through Mrs John Deboe, who is also a member of the Jazz Book Club (q.v.)

FROM THE MAIL BAG.

During the course of a month's mail we receive many interesting letters, and unfortunately we cannot print all of them. The following is perhaps typical of many peoples reactions upon discovering ragtime. Mrs. R.L.Hayne of Drexel Hill, Pa., writes, ".....last summer my life was changed with the loan of a copy of Maple Leaf. With the addition of Max Morath's book and They All Played Ragtime, I neglect my husband, pets, children, friends and house while I sit endlessly at the piano. I have played most of my life, and majored in music in college, and been exposed to all kinds of music, but never had anything affect me like this. All those articles in the women's magazines that say housewives should have an outside interest should watch out, as in this case the outside interest is in danger of taking over completely. Fortunately my husband, though he does not play, loves ragtime, - and of coursemy kids thinks it's wonderful. In fact there's almost nobody who doesn't love this. Why don't more people play it ? I'm doing my best to spread the gospel."

Tom Yates of Fort Morgan, Colorado, writes, "The Society certainly digs into the fine points of ragtime. Before I subscribed, I wondered whether or not your paper would contain anything besides a light discussion on the subject. I can easily see that the Society has tabulated more actual facts about the men and the music than an interested bystander like myself ever dreamed existed." (We're trying, Tom.Ed)

Zbyněk Mácha writes from Czechoslovakia that he has been working for many years in the ragtime and jass fields and recently finished a book about the influences of minstrel shows, ragtime, and early professional dance music in our popular music in the turn of the century. He is very interested in finding a ragtime friend to exchange correspondence and records. His address will be sent on request.

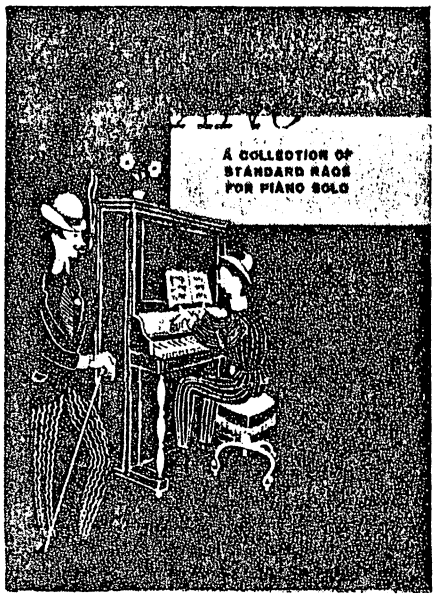
Karl Leaf writes from Ventura California that he hopes we will pass on to Bob Darch, if he has not already made plans, the idea that a book of the complete works of Lamb would go over very well. Are you listening, Bob ?

Harry Tuck of Hanford California is writing lyrics to some of the classic rags (we always thought they were complete in themselves) and asks if anyone is similarly inclined and would like to cooperate with him. Write Harry at 441 No. 10th Ave., Hanford,Calif.

Bob Mcgrath of Long Island asks if Fred Burton still plays in Sheepshead Bay and what place, and also if Lucky Roberts still owns and plays at his Bar in Harlem, the 'Rendezvous'. If anyone can answer these questions, we'll be glad to print the information.

Some time ago, the Ragtime Review asked their readers to submit suggestions and/or sketches for a lapel button for ragophiles. We have received many sketches since then, and because time does not permit us to go more deeply into the matter, we have turned all the material over to Harold Doerr of 3268 Canteen Ave., E. St. Louis, Illinois. All information, sketches and letters on the subject of lapel buttons should be forwarded to Harold.

When Tom Shea isn't busy composing or practising, he digs into some other project, and has asked our help in getting information on one Phil Porter, late ragtime man, cakewalk style, and composer of many ragtime tunes such as Cincinatti Rag. Anyone with information of, or knowledge of Phil Porter should write us, and we will be glad to pass it on to Tom Shea.



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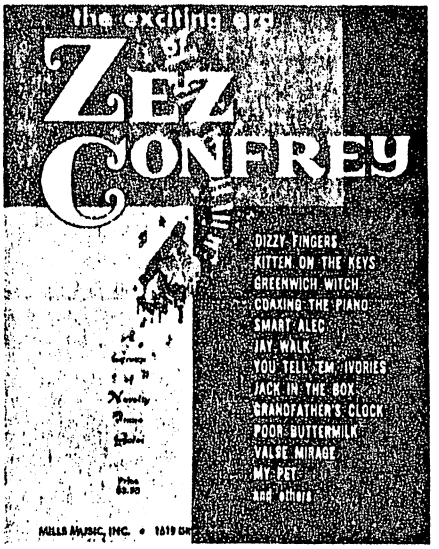

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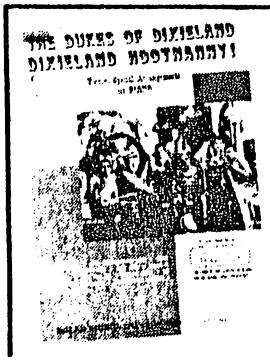

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EARLY CAKEWALKS

THE ROOTS OF RAGTIME

By KAY C. THOMPSON

UNLIKE other forms of popular music, the earliest beginnings of which are lost to us in the mists of antiquity, jazz is unique for the reason that it alone originated within modern times, which is to say, within the past 250 years. Thus, it is entirely possible to account for the evolution of jazz, from Colonial days to the present, in terms of its actual growth and development. To be sure, some readers may object to this introductory observation, believing that conclusions about early jazz are "speculative" in the absence, for instance, of published sheet music prior, say, to the 1890s. However, since published sheet music is merely one of several useful aids, I fail to see why we should not look in other directions, for the truth be known, it is surprising how much material relating to early jazz is available today. Hence, for a description of the Negro cakewalks of a hundred years ago, based upon the evidence of qualified eye-witnesses of that now distant day, I need only to quote from a paraphrase of my own, appearing in the RECORD CHANGER for October, 1949:—

"In its earliest reported form, the cakewalk was an intricately executed walking step. It was danced some years before the Civil War. Couples formed a square, the men placing themselves on the inside. The music was played in a moderate march tempo, while the dancers strutted along, performing neat manoeuvres at each of the corners. One or more judges passed upon the talents of the competing couples, eliminating them by turn, until the remaining pair of entrants were declared to be the winners, in recognition of which they were awarded a large and impressive cake. Obviously, the dance acquired its name from this fact. Following the Civil War, a number of variations were devised, all of which were called cakewalks. While we are on the subject, it is fitting to mention that the word 'ragtime' is simply a shortened form of raggedy time, or ragged tempo, a term meaning syncopated. This abreviated form seems to have come into general use as a means of distinguishing cakewalks from other dance compositions in which syncopation was not as prominent a feature."

The foregoing information, all of which, as noted, can readily be confirmed, will explain why I have long regarded the pre-Civil War years as amongst the most formative ones of early jazz. Similarly, it will explain, once and for all, why I have long regarded it as a rum and perverse business to seek the origins of early jazz, in itself the most obvious kind of dance music, in the folk songs and shouts of the late 19th century, or weirder yet, in remote and implausible African sources. However, before we consider the early cakewalks in further detail, a few words about the plantation dances of the preceding Colonial period would not be out of place. As it happens, these dances furnished the prototype for those of the succeeding cakewalk era. In addition, they throw an interesting sidelight upon the manner in which the early Negro's contact with European music provided the principal impetus motivating the upward evolution of jazz, not only melodically and harmonically, but rhythmically as well.

JIGS

Of course, at the outset, any discussion of the plantation dances of Colonial times must commence with the fact that the early Negro arrival, on acquiring a new master, was usually allowed a brief interval in which to acclimatize himself. For one thing, after a painful voyage, he frequently needed to regain his health. For another, he was obliged to learn sufficient English to follow orders in the field. And for a third, to speed his integration within the plantation community, he was taught to dance, the first steps being simple ones, patterned upon traditional Irish jigs. Needless to say, the choice of jigs was an altogether natural circumstance, for jigs represent the basic dances from which all other social types have derived. I mention the matter, for prior to the renaissance of popular dancing in the 15th century, jigs were, in fact, the universal dance of Europe, being known in Italy as the *giga*, in France as the *gigue*, and in Germany as the *geige*. That, in later years, they came to be preserved in Ireland, to the point of being regarded as that country's national dance, can best be accounted for by Ireland's insularity, which, as much as anything else, precluded her participation in the events which subsequently produced the minuet, the quadrille, the waltz, the polka, and the schottische, to mention just a few.

FIRST NEGRO COMPOSITION

Owing to the fact that both types of dancing are rudimentary, there are more points of similarity between Irish jigs and African dances than there are between the latter and those of later jazz, and thus, the early Negro was able to assimilate Irish jigs with little or no difficulty. This being so, it is hardly a coincidence that the first Negro composition, appearing in the 1780s, the year our copyright office opened, should have been a jig-style tune. Indeed, this finding is precisely what one might expect. The point is, the later development of the first pre-Civil War cakewalks, from these inauspicious jig beginnings, was contingent upon the following: (1) the introduction of a more clearly defined conception of musical, or metronomic, time; (2) the development of broader tonal recognition, as exemplified by a diatonic scale; (3) an increased familiarity with elementary harmony, commencing with the tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords; and (4) the addition of formalities and refinements, borrowed from prevailing favourites, such as the minuet and the quadrille.

Obviously, all of the above features were of European origin, and not of African importation. Moreover, the circumstances attending their gradual introduction within the conventions of Negro dance music will, I think, be more plainly perceived, if we pause to consider that a sufficient interval had elapsed, by the time the pre-Civil War period opened, to allow for the appearance of a distinct Negro musical class. Necessarily, the emergence of such a class was an inevitable prelude to the development of a truly popular music from humbler folk forms. That such a class then existed, and that it had attained a relatively high degree of proficiency, is implicit in the fact that Negro musicians accounted for the bulk of all Southern dance music in the years preceding the Civil War. That they also wielded considerable influence in shaping the tastes of other Negroes is inherent in the fact that they occupied a position in the plantation hierarchy corresponding to that enjoyed only by the house-slaves. As a result, they were freer, as well as better equipped to contribute to the changing social patterns that dominated the cultural activities of the

Negro community as a whole. So much for early background, so much for time, place, motive and opportunity. Comes now the polka, which swept the United States in 1840, producing, in its wake, a flood of newly dotted fashions, not only in musical notes, but also in clothes, dress, and other forms of popular self-expression.

While it may be shown that the minuet and quadrille exercised a marked influence on early jazz, if only in a formal sense, the significance of the polka, in purely rhythmic terms, has long been overlooked. From the viewpoint of later jazz, the importance of the polka stems from the fact that it was a 3/4 dance written in 2/4 time. Thus, it furnished the precedent for ragtime's most characteristic rhythmic device, namely, its use of secondary rag, or three-over-four, as it is sometimes called. Briefly described, the polka consisted of three jumping (i.e. syncopated) steps, executed on the the first three counts of a four-count bar, the fourth beat constituting a rest, during which moment the toe of the unemployed foot struck the heel of its mate. Naturally, when improvised, the above routine was used with considerable flexibility. Nevertheless, from even this condensed description, it should be apparent that the polka embodied the polyrhythmic elements, within a Western time concept, that enabled a large generation of ragtime players to superimpose a syncopated treble on a regularly accented bass accompaniment.

How, then, would one distinguish between an early polka and a later rag, for decidedly, the two are very different things! In layman's language I would put the matter this way. whereas a polka was a syncopated 3/4 dance set to 2/4 music, a rag was a form of syncopated 3/4 music intended for the purposes of 2/4 dancing. In short, the latter might well be described as a highly creative inversion of the former, occurring, always, within the framework of previous cakewalk conventions, which, as we have seen, date back to the earliest Colonial times. This interpretation of what happened will, as I fully realize, cause further pain and anguish to our old friend, the African theorist. Therefore, I would like to submit that the finale of Scott Joplin's opera, **Treemonisha,** provides a particularly vivid demonstration of the manner in which a 19th century schottische may be converted into a later ragtime dance, or slow drag. In citing this instance, I do so for the reason that the schottische was a close cousin of the polka, and thus, I feel it more than vindicates the view that ragtime, as Joplin himself believed, belongs with European music.

WHAT IS RAGTIME?

In The Outlook of November 7 there appeared an editorial called "Primitive Folk Songs of Broadway" which contained what might be considered a just plea for a square deal to ragtime music.

As a pianist and teacher it has been my privilege to get in touch with the musical hearts of a great many classes of people (Americans *en masse*), and out of my experience I think I have gained a fair knowledge of what the real American wants in music. No one is better situated to discover the actual musical inclinations of America than the American music-teacher; I mean the teacher of average attainment, the one who deals with the average American. Alas! no one sees more clearly or feels more forcibly the musical demands of the people than those teachers who, like myself, have spent so much time and energy in trying to instill in them something they do not seem to want.

Just what ragtime is and why it lives is not easily told. It covers entirely that type of music referred to and cleverly designated by The Outlook as "Broadway folk songs." But the common conception of it is obscure and confused. A great many people, including (apparently) some of its composers, seem to think that it is merely another word for syncopation. That this is by no means true we shall see presently.

Ragtime seems to be going through a course of evolution. Its scope is becoming broader. Year after year an increasing variety of musical style is conveniently falling under this head. And it is gaining favor.

Perhaps the most vigorous objection voiced against ragtime comes from those who, by their loftier instincts, detest its favorite haunts, namely, popular dance halls, places of ill repute, cabarets, etc. Another serious objection is its frequent adaptation in vulgar and suggestive songs. In these, however, there is no just cause for its denunciation. Being sorely neglected among cultured folks, the outcast finds refuge among the rough and worldly, where it is, in truth, much abused.

Strictly speaking, I believe there is but one well-founded theoretical objection to ragtime, and that is the occasional excessive use of its peculiar kind of syncopation. Syncopation, by its stimulating effect, is pleasant when administered in well-regulated form. It is spice. But when taken to excess it overstimulates; it irritates. That which at first is dazzling in due time becomes tiresome. The listener will soon surfeit on syncopation. Admiration turns to disgust. It is gratifying to observe, however, that this one-time doubtful feature is gradually losing favor and promises to be eventually overcome. It is also a fact of significance that these over-syncopated songs are by no means the most successful.

Perhaps the best way to define ragtime and prove that it and syncopation are not necessarily analogous will be to go to the bottom of things and summon up some actual illustrations. In other words, deal with it in the concrete.

A short time ago Madame Schumann-Heink sang for the soldiers at Camp Meade, Maryland. Immediately after the applause which greeted her first appearance on the stage one of the soldiers called out: "Sing 'For Me and My Gal.'" This was merely one of the comedies of camp life, and no doubt amused the great singer as much as any one else. She declined with a smile, and said she would sing a beautiful French love song instead.

The boy knew what he liked and called for it. No doubt there were a great many more present who would have been delighted with the captivating rhythm of this now popular song.

"For Me and My Gal" is typically ragtime, yet it is practically free from syncopation—to be exact, there are just three measures of syncopated melody, those near the close of the chorus. The most striking example of all ragtime music came out a few years ago in Irving Berlin's song "Alexander's Ragtime Band." It may be interesting to note that this song was received in London and Paris with the same enthusiasm as in New York. Over a million copies were sold in Europe.

What made this song so popular? It was not syncopation, for there is no syncopation at all in the chorus, which is the most pleasing part of the song.

Ragtime songs like the following, "Are You from Dixie?" "Back Home in Tennessee," "I Want to Go Back to Michigan," "Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula," etc., owe their success to a certain peculiar enchanting rhythm, but not to syncopation.

HAROLD HUBBS.

Gleason, West Virginia.

The Outlook, circa 1916

The above article was contributed by Bob Evans of San Diego, California. The current series of reprints from Jazz Journal and the Record Changer were loaned to the Society by Mike Montgomery.